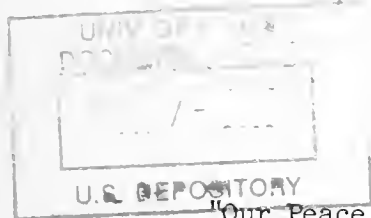


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STUDENTS OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL
SCIENCE IN THE PEACE CORPS

By William A. Bradford*



"Our Peace Corps is not designed as an instrument of diplomacy or propaganda or ideological conflict. It is designed to permit our people to exercise more fully their responsibilities in the great common cause of world development. For every young American who participates in the Peace Corps - who works in a foreign land - will know that he or she is sharing in the great common task of bringing to man that decent way of life which is the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace."

- President John F. Kennedy

President Kennedy spoke these words when the Peace Corps was established in 1961. The achievements of the Peace Corps since then have been due in part to the understanding that Volunteers with college training in political science and government have brought to its work.

Peace Corps Volunteers who accept the "common task" that President Kennedy spoke of spend two years sharing their lives and their skills with people in developing nations. In many cases these skills are nothing more than the aptitudes and techniques that the Volunteers have learned by living in a complex industrialized society. But political science majors also have a more specialized skill, and that is the ability to understand and to modify social structures. As Volunteers, whether as teachers in Africa or community developers in Latin America, political science majors are uniquely capable of increasing the political awareness of those with whom they work and of showing them the creative possibilities of good government. When a feeling of participation in the goals

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of a country has been gained by the population, then one of the most important steps toward development has been taken. To countries that are developing politically, as well as economically and technically, students of government bring especially needed skills.

Community Development

Volunteers with political science backgrounds are contributing to Peace Corps projects in many capacities. They are active, for example, in community development programs. "The aim of community development, says Peace Corps staffer Frank Mankiewicz, is nothing less than a complete change, reversal, or a revolution if you wish - in the social, economic, and political patterns of the countries to which we are accredited." Rural agricultural communities and urban slums have never been shown the possibilities of self-help - of organization and action to combat their staggering problems. They have, until recently, been neglected by national and provincial governments and private agencies to the point where their citizens have little identity with their own community or with the nation, and exist as an atomized society unable to discuss or act together.

Today there are almost 2,000 Volunteers in Latin America and another 1,000 in the rest of the world helping people to develop local organizations to help themselves. Community action may result in a new school or community center, a vaccination program or a low-cost furniture-building project, but the most important result is the feeling of mutual accomplishment that will serve as initiative for further action.

Teaching

Many political science graduates are serving overseas as teachers. "From the colonial epoch the emerging nations have inherited the form of the state, but not necessarily its prerequisites. Theirs is a legacy of expectation, not realization; of aspiration, not capacity". The expectations and aspirations that Laurence Martin identifies can be fulfilled only by education. Technical training is a part of this education, but so are classes in literature, government, history, and geography. It is by instruction in the world's cultural and political heritage that the people of developing nations can articulate their needs and can participate effectively in the international dialogue.

Political science majors, after Peace Corps training, are qualified to teach most of the liberal arts curriculum. In some cases, such as the five Volunteers who are teaching international relations and political science at Tammasarat University in Thailand, the special academic accomplishments of political science majors are fully utilized. Volunteers who serve as teachers find that it is possible to assume a degree of responsibility and initiative far greater than what is usually allowed a beginning teacher in the United States. Many use this freedom to introduce new approaches to learning which incorporate the culture and background of the students with their own interest in political science.

Cooperatives

"In the general course of human nature, a power over a man's subsistence amounts to a power over his will."

- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist # 79

In many developing nations, business methods and interest rates are such that those who lack capital find it difficult, if not impossible, to acquire

any. The rich maintain a political voice greatly disproportionate to their number. The poor have no resource base from which to seek recognition from the government or to defend themselves against exploitation.

Credit unions and production cooperatives organized by Volunteers are lessening the economic dependence of thousands of farmers and workers. Local capital is raised and saved or invested under the guidance of trained local leaders and Volunteers with a background in political science, public administration, economics, and business. Over 300 Volunteers are doing cooperative work in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Near East.

Today and the Future

Teaching, community development, and cooperatives can suggest only a few of the fields in which political science majors are working as Volunteers. Other activities range from educational television in Colombia to rural recreation in India. A number of countries are directly utilizing the special skills of Volunteers trained in government. In Liberia, for example, 50 Volunteers are helping to implement a wide variety of administrative reforms in that country's government. City planners are working in Tunisia and elsewhere, and lawyers and legal aides are serving in five African countries. Both Peace Corps planners and the host countries have admired the contributions made by political science majors in the Peace Corps. The number and variety of programs which will need political science Volunteers this year, and in the years to come, are unlimited.

Why the Peace Corps?

"An intellectual as satisfied with the world as with himself would simply not be an intellectual."

- Crane Brinton, The Anatomy of Revolution

There are many answers to the question of why a college graduate serves in the Peace Corps. The one heard most often reflects Crane Brinton's thoughts that the more one knows about the world the more one wants to help change it. The opportunity to be an effective agent of change is a strong inducement for political science majors to become Volunteers, but it is not the only one.

The three months of intensive pre-assignment training in area studies, language, community development, and other supplementary skills are a valuable addition to the college classroom experience of political science students.

Unlike chemists or engineers, the political scientist has no laboratory but society. Theories of government and politics can be tested only by observing social organization and its dynamics. The Peace Corps, as it operates to bring changes in four continents, offers a laboratory to students of government and politics unique in the possibilities it offers for observation and experimentation.

The Challenge

"There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order.

- Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince

One of the greatest students of politics counseled the princes of Italy over 450 years ago with these words. The counsel is still valid. But there is a challenge in these words for those who want change that is today greater than ever.

The Peace Corps has accepted this challenge . . . will you?

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